

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8478
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 7585

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PK
SUBJECT: PLANS FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS CONTINUE TO DRAW FLAK

REF: (A) ISLAMABAD 7540; (B) ISLAMABAD 7352; (C) ISLAMABAD
A-78; (D) ISLAMABAD 7428

1. SUMMARY. CHIEF MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATOR (CMLA) GENERAL
ZIA'S PROPOSAL TO HOLD LOCAL BODIES ELCTIONS BY YEAR'S
END CONTINUES TO DRAW CRITICISM. WHILE THE GOP GIVES OUT
CONFLICTING SIGNALS, ZIA HIMSELF MAY BE BACKSLIDING AS
MORE POLITICIANS TAKE AIM AT HIS PROMISE. END SUMMARY.
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2. CMLA GENERAL ZIA'S PROPOSAL TO HOLD LOCAL BODIES POLLS
BY YEAR END HAS RUN INTO HEAVY FLAK, AND THERE ARE INDICATIONS
THAT THE GENERAL HIMSELF MAY HAVE BEGUN TO BACKSLIDE ON
THE PROMISE. DURING HIS BARNSTORM VISIT TO BALUCHISTAN
(REF D), ZIA SAID THAT A NATIONAL REFERENDUM MIGHT BE NEEDED ON
THE QUESTION OF WHETHER TO PURSUE LOCAL BODIES POLLS; ZIA

PROMISED TO ABIDE BY THE PUBLIC'S DECISION. ZIA ALSO NOTED THAT LOCAL ELECTIONS ARE "STILL BEING REVIEWED" AND THAT HE HAS MADE NO FINAL DECISION. THIS APPEARED TO CONTRADICT CONFIDENT STATEMENTS BY MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT CHAUDHRY ZAHUR ELAHI, WHO ON JULY 24 ANNOUNCED THE GOP'S PLANS FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS.

3. ZIA MADE TWO OTHER STATEMENTS IN BALUCHISTAN THAT HAVE CONFUSED THE COUNTRY'S NASCENT PSYCHOLOGISTS:

--IN APPARENT CONTRADICTION TO HIS COMMITMENT TO STRESS LOWER LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT, ZIA SAID THAT HE WAS IN "NO HURRY" TO ESTABLISH PROVINCIAL CABINETS.

--IN SEVERAL STATEMENTS ZIA AVOIDED A DIRECT COMMITMENT TO NATIONAL ELECTIONS, SAYING ONLY THAT THE GOAL OF HIS MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION (MLA) WAS TO "CREATE THE CONDITIONS" IN WHICH TO LEAVE THE COUNTRY IN THE "HANDS OF THOSE WHO CAN RUN IT DEMOCRATICALLY". THIS FORMULATION WAS ECHOED IN LONDON BY CABINET MINISTER AND ELECTION CELL CHIEF LGEN F.A. CHISTI (REF A).

4. THE GOP'S SIGNALS REMAIN CONFUSED AND CONFUSING, HOWEVER. THE URDU DAILY JANG AUGUST 2 QUOTED THE CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER AS SAYING THAT THE ELECTION COMMISSION (REF AIR) HAD COMPLETED ALL ITS CONFIDENTIAL

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PREPARATIONS, AND THAT A CABINET MEETING IS SCHEDULED AUGUST 6 TO APPROVE THE ELECTION LAWS.

5. THE POLITICIANS CONTINUE UNABATED IN THEIR CRITICISM OF LOCAL POLLS (REF B), BASED ON THEIR FEARS THAT ZIA'S PROPOSAL SIGNALS A RETURN TO AYUBIAN BASIC DEMOCRACIES, AND IS DESIGNED TO POSTPONE NATIONAL ELECTIONS. IN HIS FIRST COMMENT ON THE MATTER, ASGHAR KHAN, CHIEF OF TEHRIK-I-ISTIQALAL (SPEAKING IN AZAD KASHMIRE TO AVOID THE MARTIAL LAW BAN ON POLITICAL STATEMENTS), SAID THAT LOCAL BODIES POLLS ARE AN "EXCUSE" TO POSTPONE A NATIONAL BALLOT. PNA VICE PRESIDENT NAWABZADA NASRULLAH KHAN ALSO SPOKE OUT AGAINST ZIA'S PROPOSAL.

6. COMMENT: IT IS STILL PROBABLY SAFE TO ASSUME THAT ZIA INTENDS TO GO FORWARD WITH LOCAL POLLS AS PROMISED. HIS SUGGESTION THAT A REFERENDUM BE CALLED TO SETTLE THE ISSUE MAY HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO PUSH THOSE OPPOSED TO LOCAL POLLS INTO LINE, AS ZIA PROBABLY THINKS HE COULD DO WELL IN A STRAIGHT "YES-NO" CONTEST AGAINST HIS FRAGMENTED OPPONENTS. ZIA, IN BROACHING THE SUBJECT OF A REFERENDUM, MAY ALSO HAVE HIS NAMESAKE IN BANGLADESH IN MIND--AS

HE HAS ON PREVIOUS OCCASIONS--AS A MODEL OF AN APPARENTLY
SUCCESSFUL MILITARY-CIVILIAN TRANSFORMATION.

7. ZIA'S "NO HURRY" STATEMENT ON PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT
MAY ALSO BE PART OF HIS POLITICAL GAME PLAN AS A SIGNAL
TO THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE (SCHEDULED TO HOLD
ANOTHER MEETING WITH THE CMLA AUGUST4) THAT ZIA MIGHT BE
WILLING TO OFFER PROVINCIAL MINISTRIES TO THOSE PNA PARTIES
WILLING TO COOPERATE WITH THE MLA.

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